

# Korea for Christ.

BY REV. W. E. TOWSON.

KOREA, blurred, blackened, and broken by sin, hangs as a pendant on the bosom of Asia; but the light which shines in the face of Jesus Christ has fallen upon it, and the promise is that soon, very soon "Chosen," the "Land of the Morning Calm," will be among the crown jewels of our Lord.

Korea is about equal in size to the States of New York and Pennsylvania, and has a population, at the highest estimate, of but twelve or thirteen millions. Though thus comparatively small in area and in the number of its inhabitants, there is no single mission field which has aroused throughout the Protestant world the intense interest and concern that Korea has. Why this intense interest in one of the smaller mission fields, in a country without any prestige or influence, in a people poor, oppressed, and ignorant? The answer is that these people have become deeply interested in the Christian's Christ and are praying: "Come over into Korea and help us."

A few dates with which to refresh our memories. Until 1882 Korea was a hermit nation. It was death for any foreigner to enter the country or for a native to leave it. The first treaty made with any nation was secured that year by the United States. The first missionary (an American), Dr. N. H. Allen, entered the country in 1884; and the first baptism was in 1886. At this time the nation was "savagely hostile to Christianity." In 1888 seven converts gathered in Seoul, the capital, with Dr. Allen secretly around the Lord's table in celebration

of the first communion. And now behold a miracle of missions! In 1908 there were in Korea more than one hundred and fifty thousand Christians, with adherents to the Christian faith numbering approximately one million. Christian truth has spread throughout the country to such an extent that an official of the government has recently said: "There are none of my people who are not favorable to Christianity."

There are but two denominations of Christians at work in the kingdom—the Presbyterians and the Methodists—represented by four or five missions. These are working in such blessed harmony that it is very probable that in the near future all the Churches in Korea will be organized into one body—the Christian Church of Korea. And it should be so, for there is no reason in wisdom or in Christianity why the expensive, unnecessary, and frequently sinful divisions among American and English Christians should be continued on the mission field.

The Southern Methodist Church began its work in Korea twelve years ago. Its report for 1907 shows over five thousand Church members, besides more than five thousand probationers. It has one hundred and eighty organized Churches, and is erecting church buildings at the rate of one a week. The Presbyterian Church has doubled itself nine times in seventeen years, and increased its membership fifty per cent last year. Dr. Underwood, one of the oldest missionaries in the country, says: "The Korean converts are characterized by four marked features: (1) They are a Bible-loving, (2) a prayer-believing, (3) a money-giving, and (4) an actively working people."

1. "They are a Bible-loving people." "They have a passion for the word of God." It is a frequent thing in Korea to have classes of men, numbering from five hundred to thirteen hundred, to meet together for ten days for the single purpose of studying the Bible. These will

go on foot over the mountains and through the valleys, frequently through the snow, from one to seven days' journey, carrying their bed clothing and food with them, in order to take part in this study of God's Word. When the men return, their wives and daughters gather for a similar purpose. It is a constant occurrence for some of them to walk ten and twenty miles to be present at an ordinary Bible class. Many in their old age learn to read in order to be able to read and study God's Word. Do not these representatives of a so-called "heathen nation" put us to blush by their eagerness for God's truth? Are they not more "noble" than some in Christian America, "in that they receive the word with all readiness and search the Scriptures daily whether these things are so?" A missionary says: "These Koreans seem to have a genius for Christianity. They grasp it with a comprehension and a comprehensiveness that amaze the missionary. Frequently New Testament passages that perplex us are clear to Koreans."

2. "They are a prayer-believing people." "The prayer meeting is the spiritual thermometer of the Church," is a frequent saying. Judged by this standard, the spiritual tide in the Korean Church must run high. Midweek prayer services, ranging in attendance from eight hundred to twelve and fifteen hundred, are a constant occurrence. The Central Presbyterian Church at Ping Yang has an average attendance of twelve hundred at its prayer services, while there are four other prayer meetings in session in the same city, with a total attendance of thirty-five hundred. These gatherings for prayer thrill all who attend them. Listen to a few testimonies from American visitors—not missionaries—who were privileged to be present at some of these week-day services. A lady visitor: "I think I was never quite so near heaven before in my life." A Philadelphia pastor: "The service was an uplift toward the up-

permost heights." A newspaper correspondent: "That was the most interesting Church congregation I have ever seen. Alert, devout, radiant, they were an argument for the old-time religion."

3. "A money-giving people." The Koreans are poor, miserably poor. The average wage of a workingman is from fifteen to twenty cents a day; but "out of their poverty they abound unto the riches of liberality." Last year fifteen thousand seven hundred Presbyterian Christians gave twenty-seven thousand dollars in American currency. Tithers among them are numerous, and there are others who contribute as much as a third of their income. Some of the women have established what they call a "rice collection." Having no money to contribute, they take a handful of the grain from the portion to be cooked, which is laid aside to accumulate, and is finally given—so that each meal pays a toll unto the Lord's cause. Of fifty-eight church buildings of the Southern Methodist Mission, forty-eight of these were built and paid for by the native people. These houses are as good or better than those the people live in themselves. When Dr. Lambuth, the Secretary of the Board of Missions of the Southern Methodist Church, was in Korea last year, six Korean women gave him their wedding rings with the request that he sell them in America, as they wanted to use the money for the building of a church house in their neighborhood. A sacrifice of this kind means far more to an Oriental woman than it would to her sister in the Occident.

4. "An actively working people." "One condition of Church membership in Korea is that the applicant has already begun to witness to others." The people, having but little money to give for the employment of evangelists, have hit upon the splendid plan of contributing work instead. Subscription lists in which the people pledge so many days of active evangelistic work

are passed around. Churches have been known in this way to promise to give within a few months what amounts to several years' work for one person. The missionaries say that over one-half, perhaps two-thirds, of all the converts in Korea have been brought to Christ by the Koreans themselves. This is an ideal condition, and one in perfect harmony with the plan and purpose of the Master himself as to the extension of his kingdom. Missionaries alone, no matter how numerous, can never win a heathen nation to Christ; native-made Christians must take up the work and carry it on, or it will never be done.

The missionaries in Korea are utterly unable to answer all the calls that come to them, and unable at times to examine even all the candidates for baptism. "The missionaries cannot keep up with the procession of native-made converts, and are in danger of nervous prostration in trying to do so," is the statement of one who has recently visited the field. One of my friends has sixty congregations on his circuit, which he is trying to visit. Another writes: "If I were to travel every day in the year, it would be impossible for me to visit all the Christian communities in the bounds of my work. . . . If there were enough missionaries to guide this infant Church, Korea might be speedily evangelized, for all things are now ready—*except the Church at home.*"

Fifteen years ago Rev. G. H. Jones was denied admission into the city of Kang Hwa, where he went for the purpose of preaching the gospel. Last year he was met at the boat landing by four hundred Kang Hwa Christians, escorted by them to the city gate, four miles away, and there welcomed by a larger delegation, the representatives of thirty-five hundred Christians in the city. The next day he preached to fifteen hundred Christians, all who could get into the house, and baptized one hundred and thirty. He asked for \$450 for new work in the

province, and was given \$750, and with it opened three new missions.

In 1897 there was but one Christian at Syen Chung, and the missionary, in order to avoid ridicule and disturbance, was forced to hold his first service outside the city on the hillside. Now there are fifteen hundred Christians at Syen Chung, and ten other congregations have been organized in the city and vicinity. The prayer meeting at this place has an attendance of one thousand or more.

The work began in Ping Yang, "a perfect sink of iniquity," in 1892, Dr. Moffett, the missionary, being stoned by some of the inhabitants. Now there are over five thousand Christians in the city, and a prayer meeting attendance of over three thousand five hundred. Of the seven ordained to the ministry last year, one of them was the leader of those who stoned Dr. Moffett fifteen years before.

The work that is now in progress in Korea is frequently spoken of as "primitive and apostolic." A visitor said: "It reminds me of the days of the apostles." The missionary to whom the remark was addressed replied: "When in the days of the apostles was there ever anything like it?" It can be said of Korea as was said of another mission field: "It is not a campaign that is being waged, but a harvest field that is being reaped."

The fear has been expressed that this wonderful work may be superficial. Mr. Ellis, the correspondent of the *Philadelphia Press*, who made a very critical study of this and a number of other mission fields in the interest of truth and accuracy, is on record to the effect that the examination given the natives applying for admission into the Church was so strict and thorough that he could not have passed it himself. The Church in Korea has the narrowest door of all the Churches in the world.

What of the future? It is confidently predicted that within fifteen years, certainly within

twenty, the people, as a whole, will have turned to Christ, and Korea will be the "first nation of the non-Christian world to become a Christian nation." Thoughtful Christians are asking: "What does this present wonderful work in Korea mean? What plans has God for this people?" "Without doubt God intends to use this little nation in some wonderful way." Some think that because of the kinship of the Chinese, both in origin and tongue, God purposes to use them as missionaries among these people. "It is through Korea that the light of Christianity will shine on the Far Eastern world," says one.

Korea is now in the hands of the Japanese government—under her absolute control and management. If Korea is patient, trying and humiliating as the process may be, the outcome will be for the larger life of the Korean people. Japan will do for the country what England has already done for Egypt. Japan has made mistakes in Korea, and doubtless will make more; but so has the United States made serious blunders in the Philippines. No true American, however, believes that our country is simply exploiting these islands for her own benefit, neither is the Japanese government doing this with Korea. I speak of the government, not of individuals. At heart the Japanese government is seeking the welfare of the Korean people. Better far that Korea should be in the hands of Japan for a hundred years than in the clutches of Russia for one day. The control of the latter would have meant the death of all missionary propaganda; but Japan permits the utmost freedom in matters of religion. "Although now bitter in its process, the ultimate outcome of the Japanese régime will doubtless be beneficial."

The future of Korea, however, is not to be determined by Japan, but by the Church of Christ. "Christ is Head over all things to the Church," and he is Head of the interests of his kingdom in Korea, and he will bring it to pass. The Church of Christ has now the unique opportu-

nity of winning a people who are pleading for the gospel to the standard of their Master. Will she heed the cry? "Usually it has been the unfelt need of an unawakened people that has appealed to the Church of Christ; but now we hear the cry of millions who feel their need and wait in tears before God and his Church for help. What shall become of us if, having excited their hopes, we only taunt their hunger with visions of bread beyond their reach? The Church *must* heed the blessed yet awe-inspiring cry. With all the tongues of flesh and type at our command, let us sound it over this land of plenty. Contract our lines! What province, which thousand of the multitude, shall we abandon to the demons that have long tormented them? The bread of life for *all* Korea, and *all* Korea for Christ!"

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